

Montrose Daily Press, Volume XVII, Number 100, October 30, 1925  — Elsie Lincoln Benedict Around the World Tour [ARTICLE]

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# Elsie Lincoln Benedict Around the World Tour

Former Montrose Girl, Elsie Vandegrift, Writes Friends of Things She is Seeing.

On the Nile, Egypt.

Dear Friends:

The Nile is Egypt's jugular vein and a trip on it takes you straight to her ancient heart. This journey furnishes much food for thought, but at the same time so much beauty and comfort you are in no danger of mental strain.

Our boat glides hour after hour under the warm Egyptian sun between banks that are sometimes near and sometimes far away—those mud banks, on whose rims so much of the strange life of this strange country is staged. We pass adobe villages much like the Indian villages of Arizona and New Mexico, except that these, built of gray mud, are much smaller and all the houses connect with all the others inside an encircling earth wall. Clustered together like this they remind you of huge wasp nests. None of the rooms are more than one story, so the planks rising above them look unusually tall.

I suppose it is my duty to tell you the exact names of all the antiquated temples we've seen, and maybe I will when we return home where ought-to's will once more come back to roost on my shoulders. But just now I am on the Nile and duties sit lightly here.

The most interesting ruins are those near Luxor, once the magnificent "hundred-gated city," but now a straggling street of curio shops along the Nile's bank. The remains of the once majestic temples of Karnak, Thebes and Luxor are visitable here, so our steamer stopped three days.

Our boat tied up in front of the mammoth Winter Palace Hotel, rendezvous of riches and royalty from every corner of the world. From it we had a fine view of the Libyan mountains 15 miles away, in whose cliffs were carved the tombs of the Pharaohs. We had tea on its terrace when caught by a frivolous mood and between times deciphered hieroglyphics at the temples, strolled down the Avenue of Sphinxes or looked for shawls in the shops.

One day we made a day's excursion to the Valley of the Kings. For several miles we traveled thru the Nile plain, then entered a rocky canyon whose sides rose like stone walls far above us.

Nothing whatever grows in this dia-

ert gorge; it is utterly sterile, stifling and desolate. The fierce sun beats down into its yellow oven with a pitilessness that in summer is unbearable, and which, even on the winter day we visited it, made us remove our sweaters and coats before noon. The gorge penetrated ever more deeply into the

heart of the mountain until it abruptly terminated in precipitous walls of solid stone. Here, in the flanks of these cliffs, are scattered the rock hewn tombs of the mighty Pharaohs of Egypt.

The most recently uncovered of them all and the only one not found and robbed centuries ago—that of Tutankhamen—had been closed again and was heavily guarded by soldiers. But we were allowed to descend into another of the tombs just like it and see, here under the twentieth century electric lights, the mummy of an ancient king surrounded by the household three servants who had been killed at his death in order to accompany their royal master into the beyond.

The chief impression the ancient ruined temples leave on me is of forests of closely-packed columns some seventy feet high and of enormous circumference, carved from base to capital with richly-colored hieroglyphics. Many of the walls still blaze with red, gold, purple and other gorgeous shades, as well as softer tints which we see in Persian rugs. We thought Cleopatra's needle in London a tremendous affair, but here are obelisks beside which it looks like a needle in very truth—stupendous shafts piercing the blue and still telling in their inscriptions the story of their builders.

The work involved in the construction of these monoliths staggers the imagination. The inscriptions are devoted to detailing the glories of the kings who erected these monuments but your mind keeps wandering from them to the untold thousands of wretched slaves who were brought from all parts of the then known world and compelled, under the lash and without pay, to devote their lives to the buildings of these advertisements in stone.

Their lot was pitiful. They worked under the fierce Egyptian sun; if it overcame them and they stopped for a moment's rest, their bare backs felt the cut of the overseer's blacksnake; if they succumbed, their bodies were dragged out and thrown to the jackals. The colors on these old columns are exquisitely beautiful and very clear after six thousand years, yet not half so clear to one's mental eyes as the blood and tears of these unhappy thousands.

The obelisks bewilder the mind with their unbelievable size, with the fact that they were carved from one solid block of stone and the baffling mystery of how they were transported and erected.

But their secrets died with them. We cannot duplicate their achieve-

ments; we cannot even guess at how they were accomplished. We can only marvel at this pitiful land that once knew all we know now, and more; that was highly civilized in the gray dawn of creation, ages and ages before any nation now active was dreamed of.

The limestone cliffs along the Nile are honeycombed not only with the tombs of the ancient Egyptians, but with the pretentious rock-hewn sepulchres and altars of crocodiles, cats, hippopotami and alligators—animals held sacred by the ancients.

But it is the sunlight, the silence, the atmosphere and colorings which make the trip on the Nile a unique, unforgettable and utterly satisfying experience.

It is astonishing how infinitely the Nile scenery varies with the time of day. In the early morning a mist usually hangs over the water and the air is chill, for the sandy wastes which border both sides of the Nile lose most of their heat at night. Above the banks the eastern hills are lavender against the sunrise and the western range is tipped with gold.

As the sun mounts, a delicate pink tinge suffuses everything, the heat disperses the mist and little white clouds fleck the blue. It grows warm very rapidly, and at midday the landscape shimmers under a white heat; the bluffs and buttresses of the rocks cast deep shadows on the sand drifts at their base; everything is brown and lemon color. At this hour the sky is more brilliantly blue, the atmosphere more crystal clear than is ever seen elsewhere.

Toward sunset the warm glow glorifies everything on the eastern shore, bringing every ridge and bluff into high relief. On the western banks the palm trees, houses and minarets, looking almost black against the glow, are reflected on the water's oily surface.

As the sun descends, distance is annihilated, the bold eastern cliffs face the full glory of the sinking sun, their biscuit-colored rocks reflecting every changing tint of the opposite sky. The world seems transformed into a fairyland of exquisite colors; gradually everything is enveloped in auddy glow; the shadows become a bright blue; the earth seems ready to burst into flame. As it reaches its greatest brilliance, the sun sinks behind purple and amethyst mountains; its last rays sharply silhouetting the figure of every house, palm tree, mosque, man and camel that happens to be standing on the high bank of the river.

But there is yet to come the best of all—the ineffably lovely after-glow which distinguishes the Nile valley from every other place on earth, and whose irresistible lure brings thousands of old-timers back every year to feast their eyes upon it.

A second glow, far more ethereal than the first, suddenly overspreads the hills, making them burn with soft, transparent pink and orchid flames, unlike anything you have ever seen.

outside of a rose opal.

The sky, trees, hills—the very air-waves—pulsate with this glow as tho a pink and lavender sun were shining upon the earth. The river becomes a stream of silver, the sail boats are rosy, the eastern palm trees are a deep red; the soft, limpid, almost supernatural light which characterizes the after sunset moments in a hot dry land, diffuses around and about you a warm glow like that which emanates from dying embers, only more ethereal and celestial—and so the day dies.

If as you lean over the rail marvelling at the beauty you have just beheld, you should be so fortunate as to see the moon appear above the palm trees and reflect itself in the silvery, moving water at your feet, you will not hurry below, but stay to watch the blacks down on the lower decks tie your steamer to the bank for the night, and repeat to yourself—if you happen to know it:

"The wind has died; today we sail no more  
O'er river reaches widening bright or wan;  
Languid we lie beside the reedy shore  
And night draws darkly on.

A wandering minstrel pipes a plaintive strain,  
Then slowly, sadly lets the music swoon;  
While, like lovely lotus, once again  
Flowers the Egyptian moon."

Lovingly yours,

ELsie LINCOLN BENEDICT

Mrs. Laura Tilden Wilson has been enjoying a visit from Mrs. J. G. Docley, of Salt Lake City. The two ladies have been friends since they were girls.